

Item #61 (Real Presences)

There is much discussion at the moment, as there should be, about really being present at Catholic Mass when there is question of the common good in the presence of a possible virus infection. I would like to suggest that God can supply what is lacking in the individual believing Catholic who is not present because of this danger. Of course the presence of the danger is something that increases and decreases, and that is not for me to judge in any particular case.

What I wish to discuss here is the importance of actual “presence” at Catholic Mass if the Catholic Mass is to have the effect that Jesus Christ meant it to have. Two presences are involved: the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist at Mass and the real presence of the Catholic believer. Both are necessary.

The Mass, we are coming to realize, is with great probability the adaptation by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper and repeated by those legitimately designated to do so in memory of Him, of a Jewish ceremony of thanksgiving. As a result of the scholarly efforts of a German Lutheran scholar, Hartmuth Gese, we are now aware that with great probability Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist as an adaptation of the Jewish ceremony of the *todah*. According to this Jewish ceremony a Jewish male took the occasion of a signal act of God’s intervention in his life (for example, survival in the case of war, survival in the case of famine for him and his family) to celebrate with an act of “thanksgiving” (or an act of “praise”, as the Jews understood thanksgiving in this context). The Jewish act of thanksgiving consisted in a holocaust in the Temple arranged by the one making the act of thanksgiving/praise and a separate ceremony in the Temple or outside of it in which the one who arranged for the holocaust presided. This separate ceremony consisted of the consumption of bread with definite prayers and hymns. Jesus instituted this Christian “sacrifice of praise” in anticipation of His Resurrection from the dead. (The phrase “sacrifice of praise” with reference to the Mass is found in the Roman Canon of the Latin Rite in the Remembrance of the Living. (Much more research needs to be done to supplement the pioneering scholarship of Hartmuth Gese, valid as it is. I have made use of Gese’s findings with my own application to the Mass in my book *Hebrews—An Interpretation*, published by the Gregorian and Biblical Press in Rome in 2016).

The Catholic Mass is an adaptation of the Jewish *todah*, not a repetition. The holocaust on the Temple altar is replaced by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, a unique sacrifice that is valid for all Masses. The subject of the act of thanksgiving at the Last Supper was the Resurrection, also a unique event applicable to all Masses. The Resurrection is still an object of faith, of course, testified by the Twelve Apostles, but now as having occurred, not, as at the Last Supper, an event that was still to occur. But it is an object of thanksgiving, just as in the case of the Jewish *todah*. The bread in the ceremony of the Jewish *todah* has been replaced by the Risen Body of Christ. (There is evidence that wine accompanied bread in the celebration of the Jewish *todah*, but this needs to be the object of

further study.) The common name for the Mass, the Eucharist, comes of course from the Greek εὐχαριστία, “thanksgiving”.

And now here is where the two “presences” come into play. There is, first of all, the Real Presence of Christ under the appearance of the bread of the Host. It is the Risen Christ who is present, but the Risen Christ who is the Victim in the Sacrifice of the Mass. The One who effects this change from the bread of the host to the Body of Christ is Christ the High Priest acting through His Spirit with the ministry of the priest who is the heir of the charge “Do this in memory of Me”.

The second presence is the presence of the one receiving the Host which is the Body of the Risen Christ (or Blood if the species of wine is in question). Only by being present can one “receive” the Body/Blood. The visual presence effected by electronic means is not sufficient to effect the reception of the Eucharist. And only if one is physically present can one participate as the apostles did at the Last Supper. Presence electronically is obviously useful for helping a “spiritualized” type of communion, but this is not the same as a physical presence that makes possible a physical communion.

How does one know the above? By the full membership of the Catholic Church, membership in the Mystical Body of Christ that makes possible the possession of the Scripture and the Tradition that makes the Scripture intelligible. **(September 22, 2020)**